



## Initiative 1163: Long-Term Care Worker Certification Requirements

Long-term care workers provide personal care services to elderly and disabled clients, helping them with eating, bathing, dressing and carrying out many activities of daily living. The term covers people who work for assisted living facilities, adult family homes or home care agencies, as well as Individual Providers who contract with the state to provide services to family members or to other people who live in their own homes. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) estimates there were about 60,000 workers in fiscal year 2013.

In 2011, Washington voters approved Initiative 1163 (I-1163), which expands background check and training requirements for these workers. It also requires them to obtain a home care aide certificate or hold another qualifying certification. Workers have up to 200 days from their date of hire to successfully pass the certification exam or 260 days if they are non-English speakers. The goal: to ensure long-term care workers are qualified to provide services to clients. Workers who do not meet the I-1163 requirements are prohibited from working with vulnerable clients. The Department of Health (DOH) and the DSHS are responsible for administering the program.

The law requires that the State Auditor's Office conduct a performance audit every two years. This, the second audit, examines whether the completion rate for home care aide certification has increased and identifies improvements DSHS and DOH have made to help more people complete the process. It also examines whether the state has sufficient monitoring processes in place to prevent uncertified people from working with clients in adult family home settings.

### **DSHS and DOH have already made several improvements that help more applicants obtain certification**

Our previous audit examined the first four months of the certification program, January 7 through April 30, 2012, and found that only 29 percent of those who applied obtained a certificate. Acknowledging that the rate was unacceptably low, DSHS and DOH made several improvements to help applicants attain certification. Improvements include creating checklists to guide applicants, making training and exam materials available in multiple languages, and working with the legislature to extend the timeline requirements. These improvements have contributed to a higher completion rate even as many more people are applying for the credential. The number of applicants increased from 406 in early 2012 to 6,776 in 2013; and the percentage of applicants achieving certification has doubled, from 29 percent in early 2012 to 58 percent in 2013.

#### **I-1163's new certification requirements state that new long-term care workers must...**

Pass a state background check before being hired and a federal background check within 120 days of hire

Complete 75 hours of training within 120 days of being hired

Pass a written or oral exam and a skills assessment

Become certified as a home care aide within 200 days of being hired (or within 260 days for those with limited English proficiency)

Complete 12 hours of continuing education annually

## More work remains to be done

Many applicants dropped out of the program, and of those who became certified, only 59 percent were certified on time.

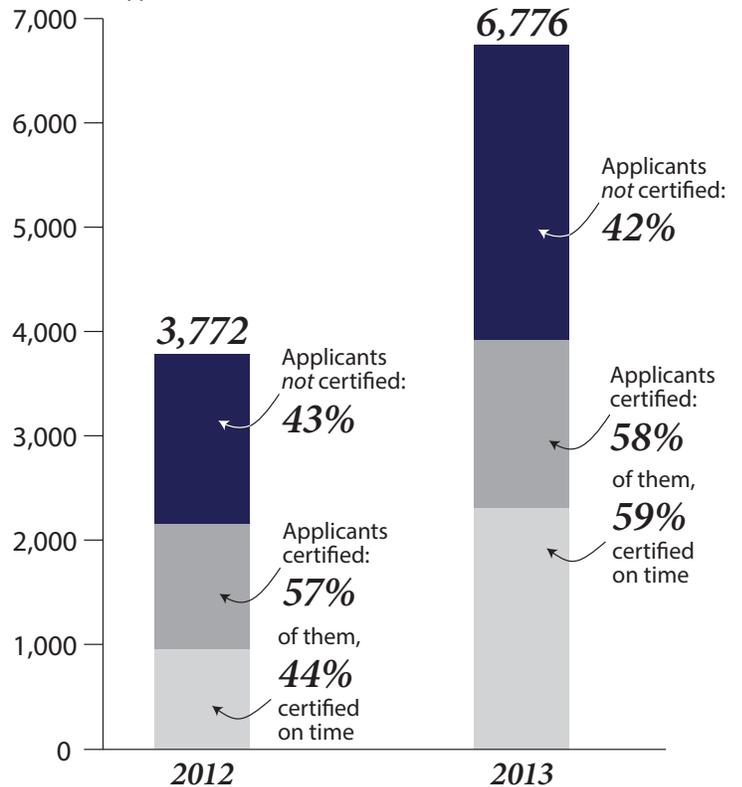
Despite the extension of the certification deadline in 2013, many applicants did not complete the process and did not obtain a home care aide certificate. Of those applicants who completed the process, 59 percent obtained their certificates within the specified timeframe. Program managers told us they believe that the failure of workers to complete the certification has resulted in a higher turnover rate, which can affect continuity of care for clients.

Program managers at DOH and DSHS are examining certification data, looking for potential barriers that might make completing the training and exams difficult. The agencies are creating a combined database that will allow them to identify trends and monitor progress. They are also working together to streamline the process by creating a single certification application form.

## Completion rates for home care aide applicants

All 2012 compared to all 2013

Number of applicants



Source: SAO analysis of Department of Health data.

## Most workers meet I-1163 requirements, suggesting monitoring efforts are reasonable

To analyze DSHS's monitoring efforts, we focused our audit on a review of adult family homes. We reviewed a sample of 273 workers from 83 of the state's 2,753 adult family homes for the month of September 2013. One percent required and obtained the home care aide certificate; 4 percent did not obtain the home care aide certification although required to do so. When we project these results to the estimated population of 10,000 workers in adult family homes, we estimate there are about 340 workers who should have certificates but do not.

About 95 percent of reviewed workers did not need home care aide certification because they were either grandfathered-in under old requirements or held other qualifying certifications

Based on our review of DSHS's processes, we found their monitoring efforts for adult family homes are reasonable given the size of the program and the number of workers. DSHS inspects homes about every 12 to 18 months and, among the many other aspects reviewed, checks about half of a home's workers to determine if they meet I-1163 requirements. According to DSHS management, limited resources means inspectors review a limited number of workers. However, if they identify issues with training or certification, the inspectors will expand the number of workers selected for review.

## Recommendations in brief



Identify barriers that keep workers from applying for, or not completing, the certification process



Send written notice to all adult family home providers, reminding them of their responsibility to ensure workers meet I-1163 requirements



Follow up on the issues we identified during the audit, including:

- The one caregiver without certification
- Reviewing all caregivers in homes found with uncertified workers
- The adult family homes that did not respond to our audit request